

The final Trek

The concluding season of the hit surround sound science fiction show *Star Trek: The Next Generation* is now being released on videotape by CIC. James Van Hise profiles these final TV episodes and looks ahead to the continuing adventures

IN 1968, WHEN THE ORIGINAL *STAR Trek* series was cancelled, many people wrote finis to the saga, but fans wouldn't let it die and fought an uphill battle throughout the 1970s to see a revival come to fruition.

Ultimately, this battle has seen several spin-off series and a whole host of new characters establish themselves as firm small-screen favourites.

Seven years after a bridge full of new faces entered the *Star Trek* universe, the Enterprise-D is warping off television and onto the big screen. But at least the team's latest season is currently being brought out on videotape from CIC (two adventures per tape). So let's kick off with some

highlights and general comments on the season's events.

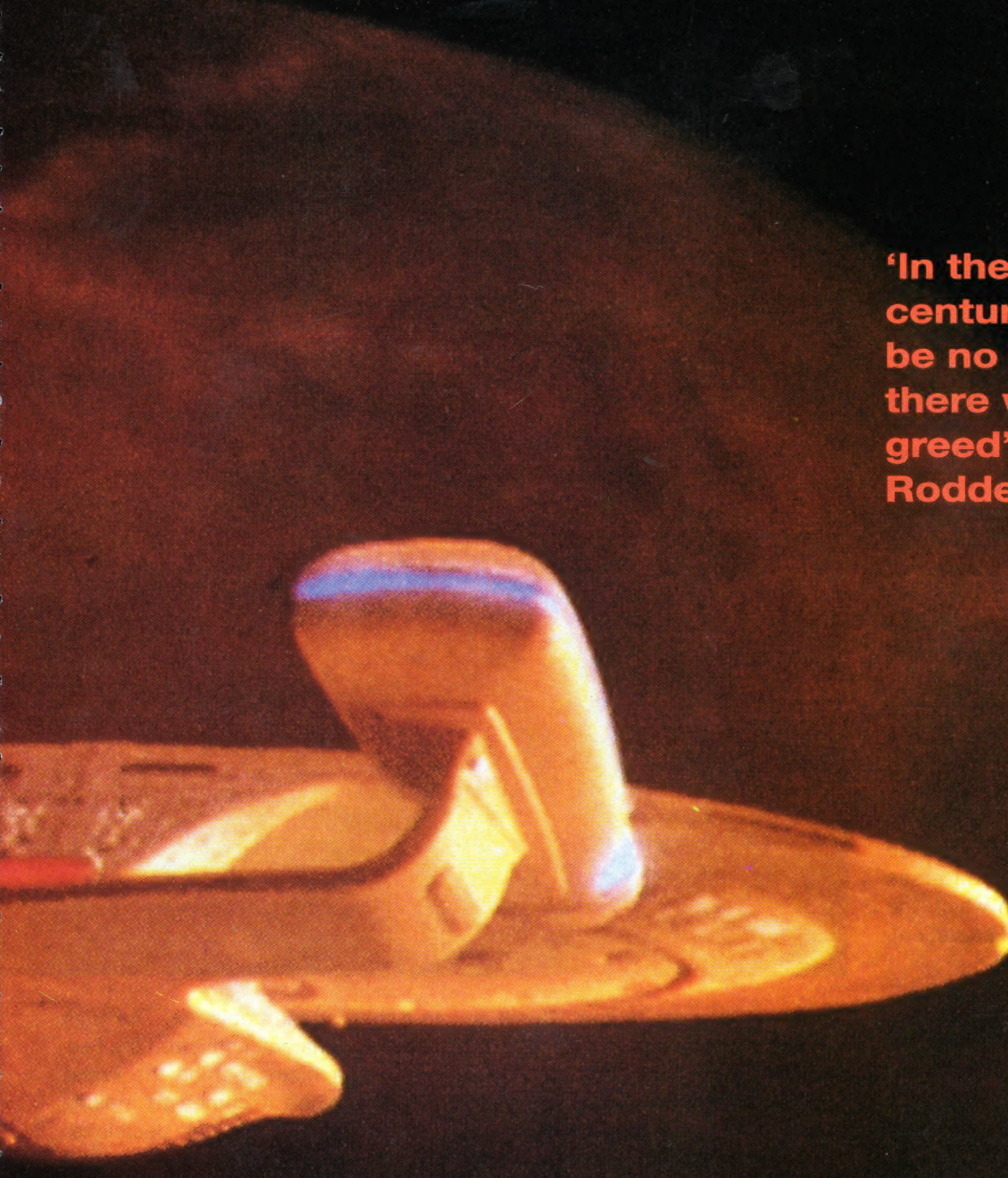
Season seven opens with part two of *Descent*, the episode which features the long-expected return of Lore, Data's evil twin. Lore has always been your clichéd evil twin (a concept unfortunately invented by American television and now widely imitated).

Descent adds the Borg to the mix, but is ultimately unexciting, although it does try very hard. It's coupled with *Liaisons*, an odd but forgettable little episode about people who aren't what they seem. There are no real stinkers in season seven of *The Next Generation*, but there are some episodes which you

forget about almost as soon as you've seen them.

The episode *Interface* is remarkable largely for the virtual reality probe device which Geordi employs to explore areas too dangerous for a person to go. It introduces his parents for the first time, only to have his mother immediately killed off. It's an interesting storyline, but Geordi so rarely gets character episodes that one would have thought the scriptwriters could have served him better than they do here.

Interface shares tape space with part one of *Gambit*, a neat tale involving Captain Picard going undercover (without telling anyone) to join a gang of space pirates. He uses the



'In the 24th century there will be no hunger, and there will be no greed' – Gene Roddenberry

cover name Galen (the name of his late professor, seen in an earlier episode, *The Chase*), and the storyline has many interesting twists and turns which make it worth repeated viewing.

Robin Curtis, who played Saavik in two *Star Trek* feature films, appears here as a Romulan who is actually a Vulcan who is actually a Romulan! Like I said, twists and turns. This is also the only *Next Generation* episode which actually reveals something previously unknown about Vulcan history.

Part two of *Gambit* is joined on tape by *Phantasms*, a mystery with enough bizarre dream imagery to give viewers restless nights, particularly the Deanna Troi living cake which is having

pieces cut out of it. This is a Data episode and is certainly one of the more unusual and imaginative ones.

Dark Page is a Deanna and Lwaxana Troi episode which offers the first dramatic turn for Lwaxana in a *Next Generation* episode since the fourth season's *Half A Life*. *Dark Page* involves suppressed memories of a sister Deanna never knew she had. A very good story, but then it's nice when the character of Lwaxana is portrayed as a fully fleshed out character rather than just a cartoon, such as she was in *Haven* and other episodes. It is coupled with the rather less interesting *Attached*.

Force Of Nature is a key episode in season seven which reveals that the

warp drive used by starships can actually cause damage in certain quadrants of space. A good story with a surprising and explosive climax.

It's joined on tape by *Inheritance*. As Data became more popular, more episodes featuring him have been made and *Inheritance* is the third one in season seven to concentrate on him. But more than that, it is a key Data episode in the entire seven-year run of *The Next Generation* as the android meets his mother, Juliana Tainer.

She had been Dr. Soong's assistant when Data was created, but Juliana harbours a secret that even she doesn't know she possesses. An excellent episode which shows *The*

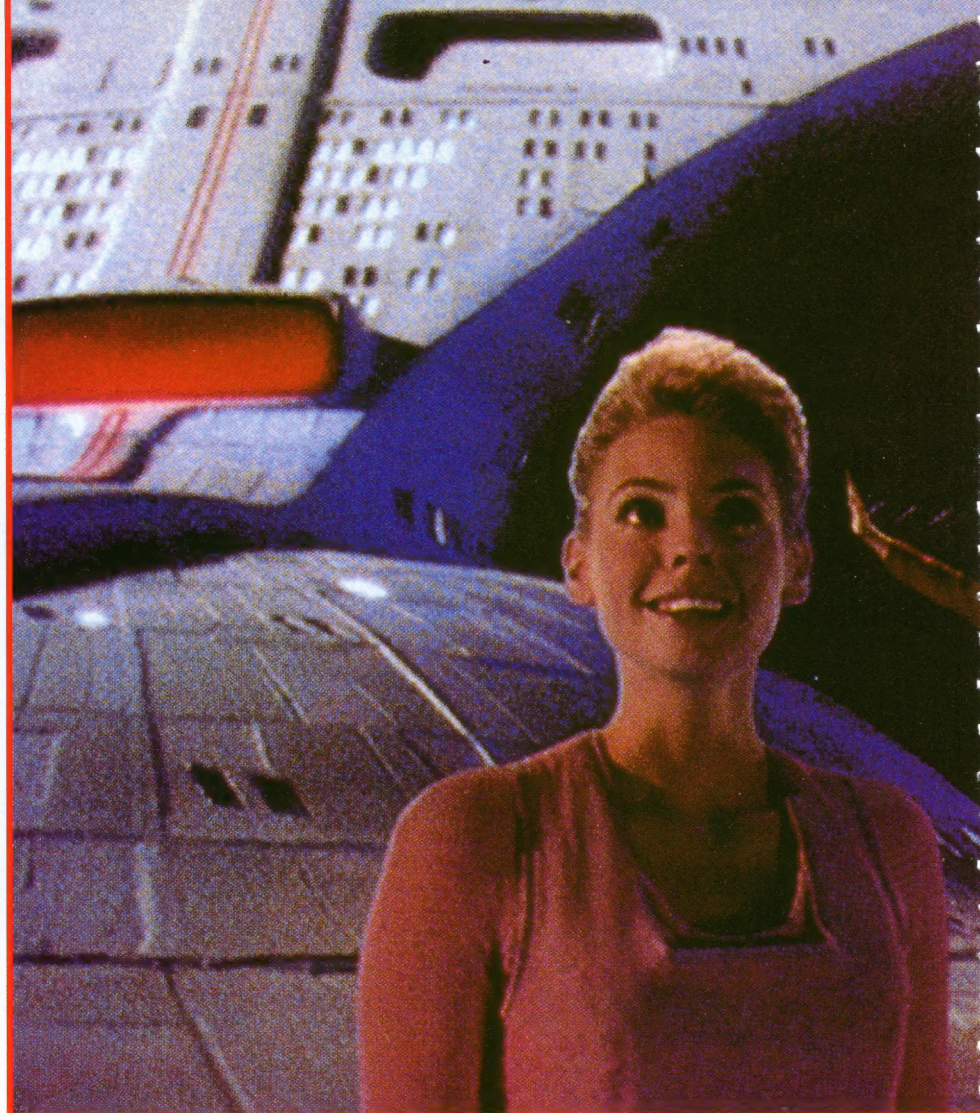
Next Generation creative crew working at the top of their craft.

Next in sequence is the double bill *Parallels* and *The Pegasus*. The former may well emerge as the single most popular episode in the final season of *The Next Generation*. Ostensibly a Worf episode, it also manages to involve the rest of the crew in crucial scenes. *The Next Generation* has managed to explore the concepts of alternate realities in exciting ways which are comparable to what the original *Star Trek* achieved way back in *Mirror, Mirror*.

What *The Next Generation* does in *Parallels* is like *Mirror, Mirror* squared, as Worf keeps shifting into one parallel universe after another, causing the parallel Worfs to shift as well. The climax, in which we see what some of these other universes are like (including one in which the Borg have conquered the Federation), is genuinely mind-bending.

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In its own way *The Pegasus* is as exciting as *Parallels* as it explores the past of Commander Riker in a manner that impacts directly on the present of both himself and the Federation. The Romulans appear in this episode, along with some of the most interesting special effects scenes pre-



sented in the series to date. This is a wonderful mystery story with a very satisfying pay-off which should not be spoiled for anyone before they experience it. In all, quite a double-bill.

On sale July 11 is *Homeward*, an episode which shows a distinctly dark side to the Federation. When the Prime Directive dictates that the last survivors of a race of intelligent people on a doomed planet must be left to die, Worf's brother intervenes and saves them.

Everyone is angry about this except the viewers, who are by now cursing the Federation – including Captain Picard – for being cruel and unfeeling!

STAR TREK SOUND AND VISION

All of the *Star Trek* season seven tapes seen so far continue CIC's track record for above-average standards conversion work. Picture quality is fair-to-good, although colour rendering is somewhat dull.

All the episodes have very overt, if a tad crude, surround sound information. Pack art, however, continues in the same standard, uniform, way.

In a third season episode, *The High Ground*, a character criticized the Federation for hiding behind the Prime Directive when it comes to making certain difficult ethical decisions. *Homeward* appears to prove the truth of that accusation. It's coupled with *Sub Rosa*.

New characters

Another episode well worth looking out for is *Journey's End* (coupled with *Genesis*, on sale Aug 25), which features the return of Wesley Crusher (a character who was never exactly what you'd call “much-loved” by the fans) in a story which ties into elements introduced in the first season of *TNG*. An involving and interesting resolution to concepts introduced nearly 7 years ago, but only now acted on.

The tape *Lower Decks* (coupled with *Thine Own Self*), on sale July 25, introduces several new characters in an intriguing story which ably demonstrates how much we can get involved in the lives of well-rendered characters we've only just met. Rumours (unproven at present) indicate that some of these characters will be fea-



tured in the forthcoming series *Star Trek: Voyager*.

Some sources deny this, but when was the last time you saw an episode of *The Next Generation* which introduced several new crew members and told a story which focused on them to the virtual exclusion of all of the other regulars?

Star Trek: Voyager

Although Paramount is still hiding its intentions with regard to *Star Trek: Voyager*, what has been learned is that it will involve a Starfleet vessel (named *The Voyager*) which is pursuing a Maquis ship (stellar rebels introduced on *Deep Space Nine* and also seen in the *TNG* episode *Preemptive Strike*). Both ships are sucked into an uncharted wormhole and spat out in another galaxy hundreds of years from home.

The crews of the two vessels decide to join forces in order to find their way back, a quest which also involves exploring the new quadrant of space in which they have found themselves. Persistent stories from various sources indicate that the

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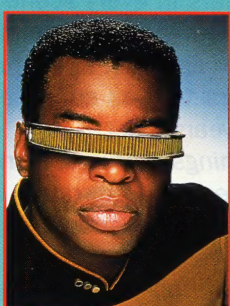
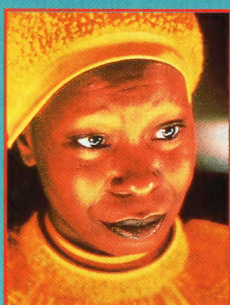
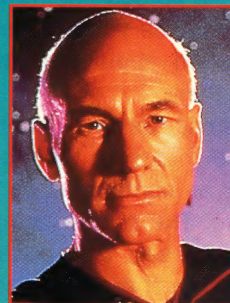
Starfleet captain will be a woman, a "Lindsay Wagner" type. The same sources state that both Jonathan Frakes and Marina Sirtis want to be on *Voyager*, but Paramount wants to start with an entirely new cast.

January 1995 is the kick-off date for the series.

Speaking of the Maquis, they figure prominently in one of the best episodes of season seven of *TNG*. *Preemptive Strike* (coupled with *Emergence*, out Sept 26) features the long-awaited return of Ensign Ro, an important regular during the fifth season. Ro Laren agrees to go undercover to help the Federation destroy the Maquis and prevent a border war with the Cardassians. But what Ro discovers is that the Maquis may well be fighting the good fight after all.

When she sees a friend slain by the Cardassians in a sneak attack, she makes her decision. This is a fine character episode and a good drama story which opens up a variety of pos-

FINAL ROLL-CALL



Saying farewell, from the top left: Picard, Beverly Crusher, Worf, Data, Guinan, Riker, LaForge, Wesley Crusher and Troi

sibilities for the Ensign Ro character to appear on *Deep Space Nine*. Actress Michelle Forbes has, however, indicated that as yet she hasn't been approached about continuing the character there.

As entertaining as the two-hour finale, *All Good Things*, is, the story is nowhere near as compelling as *Preemptive Strike*. The plot is complex and it is fun to see one possible future, both for the characters and for the Federation. However, the story doesn't really hold up to repeated viewing in the way that *Parallels* and *Preemptive Strike* do.

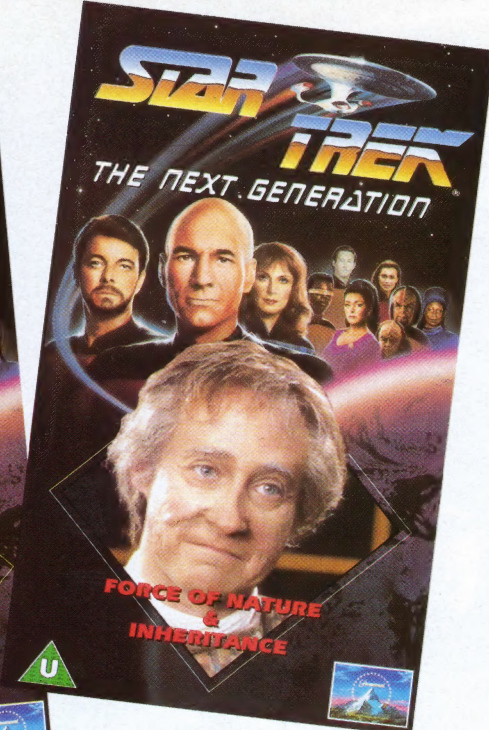
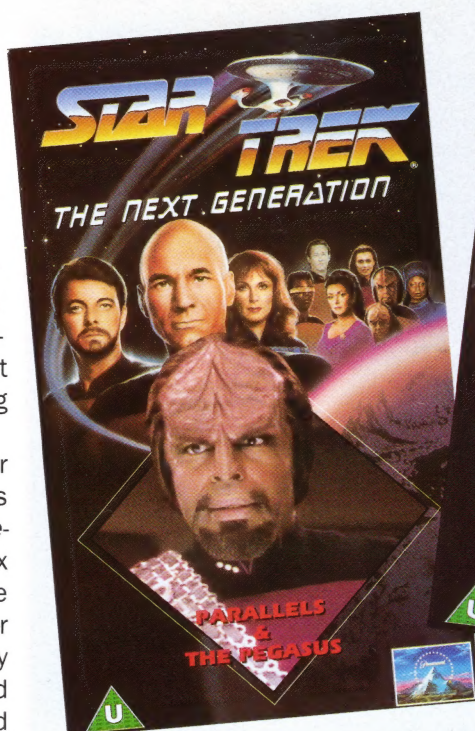
And so far as two-hour stories go, *Gambit* is actually better written, even though it isn't as cosmic in scope. The strength of *All Good Things* involves the use of time travel and seeing Picard interacting with the same people in different times, including Tasha Yar.

There were reports during the filming of *All Good Things* that Patrick Stewart was troublesome. The director of the episode denies this and the reports may stem from the fact that Stewart refused to do on-set interviews during the two weeks when this episode was being filmed.

He claimed, and quite rightly so, that he had no spare time. This is proved by the episode itself in which Stewart appears in every scene and was required to wear extensive make-up for those scenes set in the future when his character was supposed to be some 30 years older.

All Good Things marks the end of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* insofar as being a 26-episode per year television series. Although some cast members have openly complained that they don't know why the series is being cancelled at the height of its success, the fact of the matter is that Paramount can make more money from *The Next Generation* by doing a series of motion pictures and making room for *Star Trek: Voyager*.

Collectors will doubtless be pleased to hear that CIC is currently planning to release a special edition of *All Good Things*. This limited edition box



set will be bundled in with a documentary entitled *Star Trek Journeys – The Story Of The Next Generation*. Containing behind-the-scenes footage of the making of *All Good Things*, plus assorted cast interviews and commentary, this special would seem well worth hunting down. It's expected to go on sale in November.

Star Trek generations

The first *Next Generation* movie, titled *Star Trek: Generations* (not *Star Trek VII*) was already in production by the time the cast was finishing work on *All Good Things*.

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Star Trek: Generations is scheduled for a late 1994 release, with a budget of \$25 million. This is a crossover story in which Captain Kirk (William Shatner) meets the *Next Generation* gang. Besides all the *TNG* regulars,

also along for the ride are Walter Koenig (as Chekov) and James Doohan (as Scotty).

James Doohan, of course, has already been shown to be residing in the 24th Century in the *The Next Generation* episode, *Relics*.

None of the other original *Star Trek* cast members will appear. Reportedly, Leonard Nimoy was offered the chance to direct, but he felt that the script needed work. When Paramount said that time constraints wouldn't allow for the alterations Nimoy wanted to make, he bowed out of the project altogether.

The plot of *Star Trek: Generations* involves a temporal experiment which opens a link between the 23rd and 24th Centuries. When Kirk is convinced that Jean-Luc Picard and the Enterprise-D are dangerous, it's a duel of the starship captains, until they learn the truth and join up to deal with the real menace.

None of the characters from *Deep Space Nine* will be seen in *Star Trek: Generations*.

Twenty years ago, not even the most diehard fan would ever have believed that the 1980s would see a new *Star Trek* series born, lasting 178 episodes, which would usher in additional spin-offs, and ensure that *Star Trek* will never again be the province solely of reruns. □

AUTHOR PROFILE: James Van Hise has written numerous books on *Star Trek* for Pioneer Books, including *The Special Effects Of Star Trek*, *The Next Generation Crew Book*, *The Deep Space Nine Crew Book*, *The Trek Celebration*, *The Next Generation Tribute Book* and *Trek: 25th Anniversary Celebration*. He's also written books on Stephen King, Clive Barker, RoboCop, dinosaur movies and *Pulp Heroes Of The Thirties*. He's also had 50 comic book stories published. Harper-Collins will be issuing mass market editions of five of his books in 1995.